

# Lonely Grave - Thomas Whyte - Letter 4

6 Collins Street  
Melbourne

April 28th, 1851

My dear Jessie,

Again I write to you from this far off country sincerely trysting that both you and our dear children are well and the circumstances happy and comfortable; that all has gone well with you and them and that we shall be spared to meet again under happy circumstances; you are all the subject of my daily thoughts and I am continually picturing those happy days that we will yet all spend together; for although every one that I am acquainted with here are very kind and hospitable still a little house of my own again with my family around me is the constant desire within me. I hope the time is not far distant and that the time intervening will soon, very soon pass away.

I am still going on in the same way as when I last wrote you and doing the best I can for our future prospects. I am sorry to say that I have been laid up for three weeks with my father's old complaint rheumatic fever and had two doctors attending me as it is very severe in this Colony. I had to shift my bed from below the counter and take my stretcher upstairs, but everybody has been very kind and sent me everything I could desire; even the doctor, a son of old Dr. Wilkie of Grayfriars, Edinburgh, acted to me like a fellow townsman and spent hours by my bed side. I am now recovered again and although still weak, able to attend to business; it was very trying and thoughts of home and friends far away caused many a melancholy reflection and dull, dull thought. But now I am well again and in a week or two I shall be as strong as ever.

Since last writing I have been up the country where the awful fire took place, as you have seen from the papers; and truly the country had an awful appearance for miles and miles as far as the eye could reach there was nothing but the blackened ash which the bush fire had left, the carcasses of thousands of sheep lay half burnt in a mass and where substantial homesteads and smiling villages and wooded valleys formerly existed, nothing remained but blackness and desolation, a smoking desert – whole districts of country are completely ruined and hundreds of lives lost in that one conflagration – it was a most magnificent sight, the flames miles in extent sweeping along before the gale and making the whole horizon as bright as a summer's day, on it came before the wind with a noise like thunder, the crackling and falling of trees, the tumbling of fences and hurdles, the dying bleating of sheep and the noise of cattle, oh that sight will never be forgotten to my latest day – our horses actually flew amongst the country, leaping every obstacle, and facing every obstruction till they arrived out of hearing of the unnatural noise. No rain had fallen for the last two months, everything was as dry as tinder and the

flames rushed along uncontrolled. It has been the most awful thing for the Colony that has happened and ruined hundreds of families formerly in comfortable circumstances – it was a grand and fearful sight.

As I told you before we have got an assistant to Mr Forbes, she is daily getting worse and will soon to all appearances be unable to attend to his duties and we were all hoping that we would be allowed to keep him but we have not been able to do it. The Gellong people since Mr Hiny's departure have never been able to get a minister to their mind, so we have been obliged to lose Mr Tait and send him to them to our great annoyance. We expect daily some minister from home and I think the Assembly there care little or nothing about us from their neglect – there is a field here and in the surrounding districts for a dozen ministers and there is none to fill the deficiency. There must be something done soon if they wish to keep our adherence. Poor Forbes is dying off his feet from over exertion and although in such a state of health forced to perform all the duties. I am sure there are plenty of ministers at home who would gladly come if only they knew what a change they would make to the better in every respect. Money for the stipend here is no consideration if the men suit and please.

The winter is beginning to set in just when yours is done with, but it only means the rainy season, for the weather in the daytime is warmer than summer in England, though it is very dirty walking; you would think it strange at home if you had no rain for weeks, but here we have been above three months without a shower; you can fancy the state of things from this, no water in the creeks or waterholes and thousands of sheep driven from one station to another for hundreds of miles for water; I saw the road strewn with their dead bodies as on some stations more than half their stock have gone this season owing to the great drought. Water is the great drawback in this country, the want of water; it is all very well to draw rivers on maps but they are not to be found in summer when they are wanted, no little burns and streams like at home, you may travel a whole day and never get a drop unless having taken the precaution of bringing a keg of it with you – we know the value of water in this part of the world, every drop is bought even in town for so much a barrel.

I write to you of this part of the world to give you a better idea (at least a truer one) than you find in books so you can know the place I am living in, and think of me with all the associations connected with. I long very much to hear from you and my dear Jessie and Robert, and hope you will all embrace every opportunity of writing me, letting me know every little thing that concerns you and all your news.

And now by dear Jessie, good bye for the present and wishing you every blessing

I am

Your affectionate husband

Thomas